

# PAPER 1

## SECTION A Reading: Response to a literary prose text

### 1 Understanding character

A good way to introduce the idea of character could be to ask students what their understanding is of the word 'character'. Note their response. They may have heard this word used in the colloquial sense, so it is important to make it clear what is meant when we begin to talk about a 'character' in literature.

Encourage students to reflect on their own favourite character from books they have read. Ask them to define what this character is like. It is probable that each definition will encompass the character's appearance, attitudes, what he/she says and does and so on. If the class has difficulty in thinking about characters they are familiar with from fiction, you could ask them to think about characters in soap operas or films. They will undoubtedly enjoy identifying the traits of Les Battersby or Peggy Mitchell. You could then ask them to identify the different elements that combine to form our understanding of a 'character'.

A good way to encourage students to think about the many different facets of character is to get them to think about how they, or a friend, might be defined if they were being described in a novel. This could either take the form of an oral or a written task. A way to make this task more fun could be to get everyone to write a short description of themselves as a character from a novel. Start them off by offering your own personal description. Then gather the class descriptions, read them out and get them to guess whose description is being read. They might even consider the genre their character fits into (gothic, romance, detective story, etc.).

#### *The character's appearance*

A way of ensuring students concentrate solely on a character's physical description is to collect a range of pictures of people from magazines and newspapers. Distribute these to the class and encourage them to describe the characters in as much detail as possible.

## ACTIVITY 1

Reading from *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens

Miss Havisham is a fairly well-known character so some students *may* already know her story; however, this does not mean a range of tasks cannot be carried out around this extract. Sketch the details of the plot for the class or even allow them to read further extracts from the novel.

## Oral tasks

- ▶ Hot-seat Pip after his meeting with Miss Havisham.
- ▶ Internal monologue based on Pip's first experience of Miss Havisham (students might want to find out the plot of the novel to help them with this).
- ▶ The 1946 David Lean film version of the novel is a classic. Students could watch the section where Pip meets Miss Havisham for the first time. Prior to watching the film they could discuss their mental images of the character. After watching the film they could compare their ideas about what Miss Havisham should look like with this representation of her. They could then conclude this task by deciding upon a suitable actress who could play this role in a new production.
- ▶ Whole-class or group discussion on the topic of marriage – is it still relevant in today's society? Are women more eager to get married than men? What qualities would you look for in your ideal partner?

## Writing tasks

- ▶ Imagine you are Miss Havisham. Write about that fateful day when your world changed for ever.
- ▶ Write a poem or internal monologue based on Miss Havisham's thoughts about her fiancé.
- ▶ Write Pip's internal monologue upon seeing Miss Havisham for the first time.
- ▶ Imagine you are an agony aunt/uncle. What advice would you give Miss Havisham for 'getting over' her unhappiness?

## Reading task

- ▶ As well as reading further extracts from the novel, students could examine Carol Ann Duffy's poem 'Miss Havisham'.

## *The character's speech*

The way in which a character speaks, as well as what he/she says, is very important. It is essential that students are aware of this. A way to illustrate this point is to give students an extract of dialogue and to get them to experiment with speaking it loudly, softly, quickly, slowly and so on. Then get them to note how their understanding of what is being said is changed by how the words are spoken.

Students could work on writing their own script for specific types of character. These could be characters students are familiar with from a play or novel they have been studying, or they could be of their own invention. Ask students to experiment with sentence lengths, and encourage them to think about how the length and complexity of sentences convey character.

Writing authentic dialogue is a difficult exercise; students could tape real dialogue and then experiment with using extracts from it. This is also a good way of making students aware that dialogue fiction is not 'natural' but constructed, and that each word is chosen for its specific meaning and significance.